

## Treatment of stream of consciousness technique in *Happy Valley* by Patrick White

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### Abstract

Stream of consciousness as a literary technique came into existence in late nineteenth century and used extensively by British writers. It later became popular and applied by writers across Britain. In the realm of Australian literature the name of Patrick White sounds like a literary giant. His first novel *Happy Valley*, published in 1939, when he was just twenty seven, is a refined example of stream of consciousness novel where through the application of plethora of characters White has presented exquisitely the inner thoughts, emotions, actions, their reactions and responses towards their lives, surroundings and incidents. The setting is a small town in Happy Valley, as a matter of fact it becomes witness of the shapeshifting of all the major characters of the novel. In the course of the plot we can see all the major characters or families are directly or indirectly sutured to one another, each character's personality or consciousness is revealed in terms of other character's consciousness, occasionally pieces of conversations and dialogues are there. All these underscored the psychological effect precisely. It is an exquisite study of human character, life and background.

**Keywords :** consciousness, eponym, jackaroo, epigraph, psyche, metaphor.

### Introduction: Treatment of stream of consciousness technique in *Happy Valley* by Patrick White

The term 'stream of consciousness' is a literary technique that shows the thoughts and feelings of the mind of a character as they take place. The continuous flow of thoughts that builds up an individual's conscious experience. Through these flow of emotions or stream of thoughts and feelings it seeks to describe this process by means of a long unstructured soliloquy. This literary device is a very prominent technique of modern period. It was first time that through an innovative technique the miscellaneous feelings and contemplations are noted without the consideration of rational argument and narrative sequence. This is a literary device that has become customary in the field of literary criticism. By dint of this literary device the author tries to exhibit all the internal and external agents or forces that effect the inner psyche or psychology of a character at a single moment. In this way the mixing of mental processes in fictional characters are presented. If we reflect upon the writers of fiction of the eighteenth century, they tried to represent the thoughts and feelings of a fictional character in terms of other fictional character's thoughts, action, feelings, reactions or dialogue. Stream of consciousness was a technique first time used in the nineteenth century to get rid of the sentimentality or formality of the Victorian period. The literary term was first used by William James in 1890 in his famous book *Principles of Psychology*. James stated " Consciousness... does not appear to itself chopped up in bits.... a 'river' or 'stream' are

the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. " The early and famous exponents of stream of consciousness were James Joyce William Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, D. H Lawrence. In fact the technique was opened up by Dorothy Richardson in her novel *Pilgrimage* (1915). Later it was dexterously used by James Jouce and further developed by Virginia Woolf, Henry James, William Faulkner. The writers attempt to express the inner thoughts or conflicts in the mind of one or more characters. They explore the mind of character, so obviously this is collaborated to psychology. One very relevant example is James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Other notable works deserve mention are William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. Many other writers apart from Britain too imitated this technique and employed skilfully. Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*, Tony Morrosson's *Beloved*. One such important novel is *Happy Valley* by Nobel Prize winner Patrick White from Australian literature.

The eponymous Happy Valley is a land of dreams aspirations of mysteries or secrets of 'snow and ice and wind'. It is a remote little town which is settled down in its panorama of abandoned beauty. The characters in the story amply reveal their inner psychic mechanism. As if each and every character had his/her own tale to tell the readers. Each and everyone has his /her own loss and aspirations. Everyone suffers from acute loneliness and desperately trying to escape which grows intense passion. All the major characters think of escape. I must move away from here, thinks Dr Oliver Halliday, also comes to mind of Alys Brownne, Sidney Furlow. But the place Happy Valley is inescapable. It cannot be left easily. In the course of the novel, we can see that almost all the characters, with their characteristic dialogue and expression, little by little drifted towards sadness and acceptance of life that is circumscribed by lot. This circumscribed lot of these characters reflects the predicament of humanity as a whole.

Autobiographical tones are scattered throughout the thirty three chapters of the novel that consists of two parts. We all know that Patrick White discovered his mighty expressive voice as a result of the war if we read his life story. Manoly Lascaris, Australian dramatist, played an important role in White's life, he led White to find love with life. One of his classical pieces was *The Aunt's Story*, that was brought back to Australia with him in the year 1946, the symbol of his love and hate for Australia. It also catered to the sustaining themes of his classic work. To Patrick White Australia is a thoroughly experienced and suffered homeland from which he cannot isolate his soul. The homeland is intricately related to his heart. With this novel *Happy Valley* Patrick White gives vent to his own thinking and feelings. It is an all-embracing novel of Australian life that mirrors Patrick White's own work and life experiences in the Monaro as a jackaroo(a white man living outside of a white settlement in Australia ). The narrative structure is shared appropriately and squarely among a group of characters. This renders the narrative technique unfamiliarity and newness. White has mirrored some unfavourable details about a local Australian Chinese family. Through the story the young writer (Patrick White was twenty seven when he wrote this novel was published )who is desperately finding his soul, his feet, his happiness, which is applicable for all the characters in the novel. Happy Valley for them is a kind of illusion. The valley expands : "more or less from Moorang to Kambala, where originally there was gold, and it received its name from the men who came in search of gold,.... They called the place Happy Valley, sometimes with affection, more often in irony. " So we are left "with small equipments and fund of expectation." There is a very small activities and excitements nearby any more. The Happy Valley is not inviting one, we can see in the opening pages, the setting is an acute winter. "It had stopped snowing. There was a mesh of cloud over the fragile blue that sometimes follows snow. The air was very cold. In it a hawk lay,... The frost glittered

like a dull knife. “ The symbols of lonely hawk, snow, chilly winter, dull knife – all convey the utter sad human predicament come out through the thought, action and dialogue of the major characters who are self-conscious. In this apparent valley of happiness all the dwellers suffer, the valley which is colder, “than anywhere else in the world. “ Even summer also doesn’t provide any comfort or relief, physically as well as mentally.

At the beginning of the novel we are introduced to Dr.Halliday, in charge of a pregnant woman. He is attending the lady. The eventual scenes are reduced to by unexpected deaths – the fact which, in a sense, prevents Dr.Halliday in his expected pathway. It literally prevents him from his getting away of Happy Valley. The scene of labor is a prolonged and toilsome one, the consequence by now shows much that will be represented in Happy Valley : no wonder, no expectation. The place is not so happy as it seems. Ad has already been stated this is a little town story that focuses on the fates of several of it’s dwelling families and people. This is a place where :”Nothing much appeared to happen besides, though a lot was really happening all the time. “ The characters in the novel not perceive this. All struggle towards touching a certain vantage point of life but in vain. In the novel Dr.Halliday says: “ I have learnt this, he felt, that it is pitiable., this Happy Valley, even in its violence that at first you thought deliberately destructive and cruel there is a human core that makes overflow with pity for it. “ This is the reflection upon life of Dr.Halliday who ruminates upon his past life with series of disjointed contemplations, a prominent feature in stream of consciousness technique. In the novel, there are adequately ample of characters, whose thoughts, fates, actions and lives are,, almost strangely, interwoven.

In the novel there is Dr. Oliver Halliday and his small family his wife Hilda and two sons, Rodney and George, four years old. At the beginning of the novel Rodney is nine. Rodney cannot acclimatise himself with the local culture and society and suffers; his father has an aspiration for move on, for a better life. Rodney cannot adjust in local school too. Halliday ruminates on shifting a new place other than Happy Valley to furnish his professional career and family, but eventually couldn’t. There is another character Alys Browne, like the Hallidays, attempted an escape a little. While she was just fifteen years old she demanded, “Father, I am going to Sydney. “ She went there to a convent school to learn playing piano and needlework. But she is driven back to Happy Valley. In Happy Valley being alone she ponders over what to do in future, concerned about life. Later she leaves her piano hobby and dreams of moving to California, US. In Happy Valley, with a local girl she invest some money, which she have, to fructify their dreams. They think this will ease their escape to California. She is drifted towards Dr.Halliday. In the course of the story Rodney, when young, makes friend with a girl, older than he, half-Chinese Margaret Quong. She took lesson from Alys Browne and is unable to acclimatise in the society. Rodney reveals his fantasies to Margaret who thinks these are childish ones, but she cooperates with some of them. This is a kind of remedy for her frustration to engross herself in the fantasies of Rodney ad the reality was grimmer. She is afflicted as her mother flounders in the trauma of what she thinks the biggest mistake of her life -she grew pregnant by a Chinaman and as a result Margaret, part Chinese identity, was born.

Another inhabitants of Happy Valley were the Furlows. The Furlows were well-established family with ample property, wealth and renowned in the society. Patrick White analyses Mr Furlow in such following words : “Mr Furlow had not a mind, only a mutual understanding between a number of almost dormant instincts. “ Mrs Furlow, has ample reasons for eagerness because quite hopefully she watches their daughter Misd Sidney Furlow is proposed by Roger Kemble. She is hopeful about their matching and thinks their union “which would provide through marriage the topmost pinnacle. “ But Miss Sidney Furlow

is headstrong and she cherishes other motive. Irritated by Roger's flattery when she thinks that this is the normative way of the lot of her life she takes the hold of the matters into her own control -opted out her life primarily as her mother had dreamt of and thereafter a later one, in a surprising manner. In this way the characters make choices which are significant but these have not acted in an expected manner. The characters have made bigger aspirations or ambitions but those ambitions always fall short of realization. The bigger the ambitions are more distant they seem, as in the case of Dr Halliday's wish to move on, reminds the resounding of the three sisters scream of "Moscow!" in *Three Sisters* by Anthony Chekhov in 1901. Alys Browne observes: "All the time we have been going to America". What remains problematic for all the characters is communication. They are all paralysed in their endeavours to communicate and express their need and wishes; Throughout the pages there is the undertone of "inarticulation of words "; again reminds us the nonsense dialogue in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Dr Halliday ponders over his own marriage in the following words : " It is like this with Hilda. I have never spoken to Hilda using anything but the outer convention of words. We look at each other, hoping for something that does not come. "

In this way *Happy Valley* is, as a matter of fact, the unexplored land of Patrick White and it is an uncommon novel. White admitted that he was immensely influenced by Gertrude Stein, an American novelist, who is believed to have an influence in the background and setting of the Australian country and small town life. White also acknowledged that he might have been 'drunk with the technique of writing ' and ' had gone up that cul de sac the stream of consciousness ' technique. Patrick White is indebted to Gertrude Stein in structuring his narrative pattern of stream of consciousness. Stein's style directed him to a bit of trimming decoration, to rhythmical repeats, the paratactic effects of choice of words that at times make his sentences to some extent overburdened or too thickly hued. The stream of consciousness technique has been dexterously employed and it is, actually, a pretty effective and elastic modification of that can be imitated from James Joyce and does not obstruct narrative. The narrative eliminates quotation marks to point out speech and it uses a quite elastic wandering point of view technique, with little inserted monologue, but it does not render the narrative vague or slow moving. It is nice to observe a radically dramatic novelist is much less decorated and ambiguous than William Faulkner, the clear point of likeness. Any naive reader who will evaluate the stream of consciousness technique of *Happy Valley* may infer that the twenty seven years young novelist Patrick White merely reflected the style of his literary masters that were in vogue at that time -Virginia Woolf's harrowing day dreams, John Dan Passo's wandering camera eye that seeks for communitarianism. But even the literary elders may struck by the conviction with which Patrick White delineates his narrative in the time of the most advanced and affected forces of the world.

The epigraph of *Happy Valley* is taken from Mahatma Gandhi and White has artistically presented 'the soul's dark night in a range of ordinary human hearts. ' In the epigraph White tells (the quotation from Gandhi): "It is impossible to do away with the law of suffering which is the one indispensable condition of our being. Progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone... the purer the suffering the greater is the progress. " The narrative itself embraces this in the character of Dr Halliday, who comes out redeemed after getting himself under a process of isolation and estrangement from his family and his wife. This theme of 'indispensable condition 'of suffering is a predominant concern of White's and he applies every features of it in almost all his novels., *The Tree of Man*, *The Voss*, *The Aunt's Story* etc. The *Happy Valley* not only presents the dominant theme but also, may be for the first time, presents distinct characters that are reiterated with surprising regularity in White's later novels. His

characters are chosen and they are always “the poor unfortunates “ (the epigraph to *The Burnt Ones* ). They are all doomed to suffering because of their instinctive quality to feel the riddle behind their everyday existence. Among these selected few characters are first presented in the *Happy Valley* in the characters of Chuffy Chalmers and Alys Browne. She is the first of lonely women who according to White are “born with inward looking eyes. “(*The Burnt Ones*) The pitiful conditions of these women and their responses to their adverse situations are of utmost concern for Patrick White.

All of these ineluctable human experiences have been better represented by the use of stream of consciousness. Through this device White not only slowed what were the characters’ thinking but also the replication of the experience of thinking, that allowed the readers to enter the mind and world of the characters more well. This stream of consciousness technique effectively contributes to the overall development of a well knitted plot in the novel. White has presented here a non-linear plot structure, one that moves backward and forward in time and the plot is elaborate one. Dr Halliday is dissatisfied with his conjugal life and finds himself drawn towards Alys Browne in love, the piano teacher. She, in turn, becomes the mentor cum guide to Margaret Quong, the disappointed daughter of an Australian Chinese family. She bothers least about her drunkard father and her over argumentative mother. But she finds comfort and solace in her sympathetic aunt, Amy. She is loved by Rodney, Dr Halliday ‘s elder son. Once in a moment she is attracted by the exhausted and imbecile schoolteacher, Moriarty. His carefree wife Vic is in an illicit relationship with Clem Hagan, an unskilled laborer. He is a gloomy figure with distant similarity to the curt manhood of White’s later novels. He does not mind making love with Vic in the hay but he also likes Miss Sidney Furlow, she too loves him and considers him her toy.

*Happy Valley* is a first fantastic novel in which White earnestly tries to drive the wild horse of his tentative motives while also involving, with outstanding aspiration, his desire to compose a narrative of country life in stream of consciousness technique. Patrick White tries to make the readers understand about mentality of males for females and vice versa. Patrick White shows the internal frustrations, he lets the readers know and feel how precisely Dr Halliday feels about life, about his family, his future, his profession and humanity as a whole. White in the novel *Happy Valley* not only shows the stream of consciousness of particular himself or herself, but also through the consciousness of other characters. It is through the twin devices that White has represented his characters in an array so that readers can see the consciousness of Dr Halliday through the consciousness of Mrs Halliday, Hilda, through the consciousness of Rodney, George, Alys Browne, Margaret Quong, Mr Furlow, Mrs Furlow, Sidney Furlow. As a matter of fact every character is delineated in the narrative through his/her consciousness and also through the consciousness of other, at the same time, they are sometimes narrated to the readers straightly by all knowing author of the novel, occasionally pieces of conversation or dialogue between the characters.

May be this is not the best or major novel of Patrick White but had it not been published in the year 1939 it could have commanded the attention of the world. It is a book we need to re-explore. Patrick White appears as a growing novelist, as new and engrossed and animated with hope to rebuild the world as ever his homeland Australia was beatified. We shall conclude with the quotation from Margaret Leonora Eyles, British novelist :”Mr. White’s first novel is a study in boredom. (...) Mr. White moulds his style Mr. James Joyce -which may be an advantage or not ; in spite of the incomprehensibility of many of his pages, we get a vivid picture of characters and background. “(Times Literary Supplement )

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