

Twentieth-Century Fiction I

October 24. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (I)

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Virginia Woolf

b.1882 Kensington, London

1895 Mother Julia dies; VW has first breakdown

1904 Father Leslie dies; VW briefly institutionalized

1904-12 Lives in London; Bloomsbury

1912-15 marries Leonard Woolf; attempts suicide; move to Richmond; *Voyage Out*

1917 Founds Hogarth Press w/ Leonard

1919 *Night and Day*

1922 *Jacob's Room*; Meets Vita Sackville-West

1924 Returns to live in London

1925 *Mrs. Dalloway*

1925-32 Period of significant production

1941 Suicide



Wikipedia

Joyce's indeterminacy

“The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.

–Trying to refine them also out of existence, said Lynch.”

(180)

Woolf's indeterminacy

“The writer as narrator of objective facts has almost completely vanished; almost everything stated appears by way of reflection in the consciousness of the dramatis personae.”

“[T]here actually seems to be no viewpoint at all outside the novel from which the people and events within it are observed, any more than there seems to be an objective reality apart from what is in the consciousness of the characters.”

Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (1946)

The occurrence & the interlude

“The time the narration takes is not devoted to the occurrence itself ... but to interludes.”

“A sharp contrast results between the brief span of time occupied by the exterior event and the dreamlike wealth of a process of consciousness which traverses a whole subjective universe.”

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“Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.” (3)

A → B

The interlude

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A → ? → B

The interlude

“Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer’s men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning – fresh as if issued to children on a beach. What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now...” (3)

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Multipersonal representation of consciousness

“The essential characteristic of [Woolf’s technique] is that we are given not merely one person whose consciousness (that is, the impressions it receives) is rendered, but many persons, with frequent shifts from one to the other.... The multiplicity of persons suggests that we are here ... confronted with an endeavor to investigate objective reality ... from as many sides as closely as human possibilities of perception and expression can succeed in doing.”

Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (1946)

Multipersonal representation of consciousness

“She stiffened a little on the kerb, waiting for Durtnall’s van to pass. A charming woman, Scrope Purvis thought her (knowing her as one does know people who live next door to one in Westminster); a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious, though she was over fifty, and grown very white since her illness. There she perched, never seeing him, waiting to cross, upright.”

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Discussion

- Interlude (and Occurrence)
- Multipersonal Representation of Consciousness

Identify a moment when Woolf is employing one (or both) of these techniques. Think about your example's occurrence or event, its interlude, the voices involved (or *not* involved), and how Woolf navigates the transitions.

Feel free to use your vocabulary of types of discourse (direct, indirect, free indirect) to discuss *how* Woolf does what she does.

Moments of being

“Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel.”

(“Modern Fiction,” 149-150)

Moments of being

“[The shocking moment] is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole.... [I]t is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool [of everyday life] is hidden a pattern; that we – I mean all human beings – are connected with.... [W]e are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself.”

(Virginia Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past”)

Moments of being

“In people’s eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brassbands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment in June.”

(4)

The city

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“London thou art a jewel of jewels, & jasper of jocunditie – music, talk, friendship, city views, books, publishing, something central & inexplicable, all this is now within my reach...”

(Virginia Woolf, *Diary Vol.2 1920-1924*)

The city

“Suddenly Mrs. Coates looked up into the sky. The sound of an aeroplane bored ominously into the ears of the crowd. There it was coming over the trees, letting out white smoke from behind, which curled and twisted, actually writing something! making letters in the sky! Everyone looked up.”

“But what letters? A C was it? an E, then an L?”

“Glaxo”

“Kreemo”

“It’s toffee”

“All down the Mall people were standing and looking up into the sky.”

(20-21)

“Imagined communities”

“Consider the structure of the old-fashioned novel... It is clearly a device for the presentation of simultaneity in ‘homogeneous, empty time,’ or a complex gloss upon the word ‘meanwhile.’”

Time:	I	II	III
Events:	A quarrels with B C and D make love	A telephones C B shops D plays pool	D gets drunk in a bar A dines at home with B C has an ominous dream

(Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*)

“Imagined communities”

Time:	I	II	III
Events:	A quarrels with B C and D make love	A telephones C B shops D plays pool	D gets drunk in a bar A dines at home with B C has an ominous dream

“What actually links A to D? Two complementary conceptions: First, they are embedded in ‘societies.’ These societies are sociological entities of such firm and stable reality that their members can even be described as passing each other on the street, without ever becoming acquainted, and still be connected.”

“Second, that A and D are embedded in the minds of the omniscient readers. Only they, like God, watch ... all *at once*.”

(Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*)

Simultaneity

“First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air.”

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Simultaneity

“Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion, until the mound of time was so far diminished that a commercial clock, suspended above a shop in Oxford street, announced, genially and fraternally, as if it were a pleasure to Messrs. Rigby and Lowndes to give the information gratis, that it was half past one.... [S]ubconsciously one was grateful to Rigby and Lowndes for giving one time ratified by Greenwich....”

(102)

Next time

Finish *Mrs. Dalloway*

Commonplace on *Mrs. Dalloway*, and comment on someone else's post (either Woolf or Hemingway)

Discussion (& thinking ahead)

Think about Dalloway, Septimus and the relationship the novel constructs (or fails to construct) between them. They're by far the two dominant figures of *Mrs. Dalloway*, and yet the logic by which they're connected is cloudy and mysterious. In the portion of the novel you've read so far, how does each fit into this ambiguous system of community, of simultaneity and idiosyncratic subjectivity?